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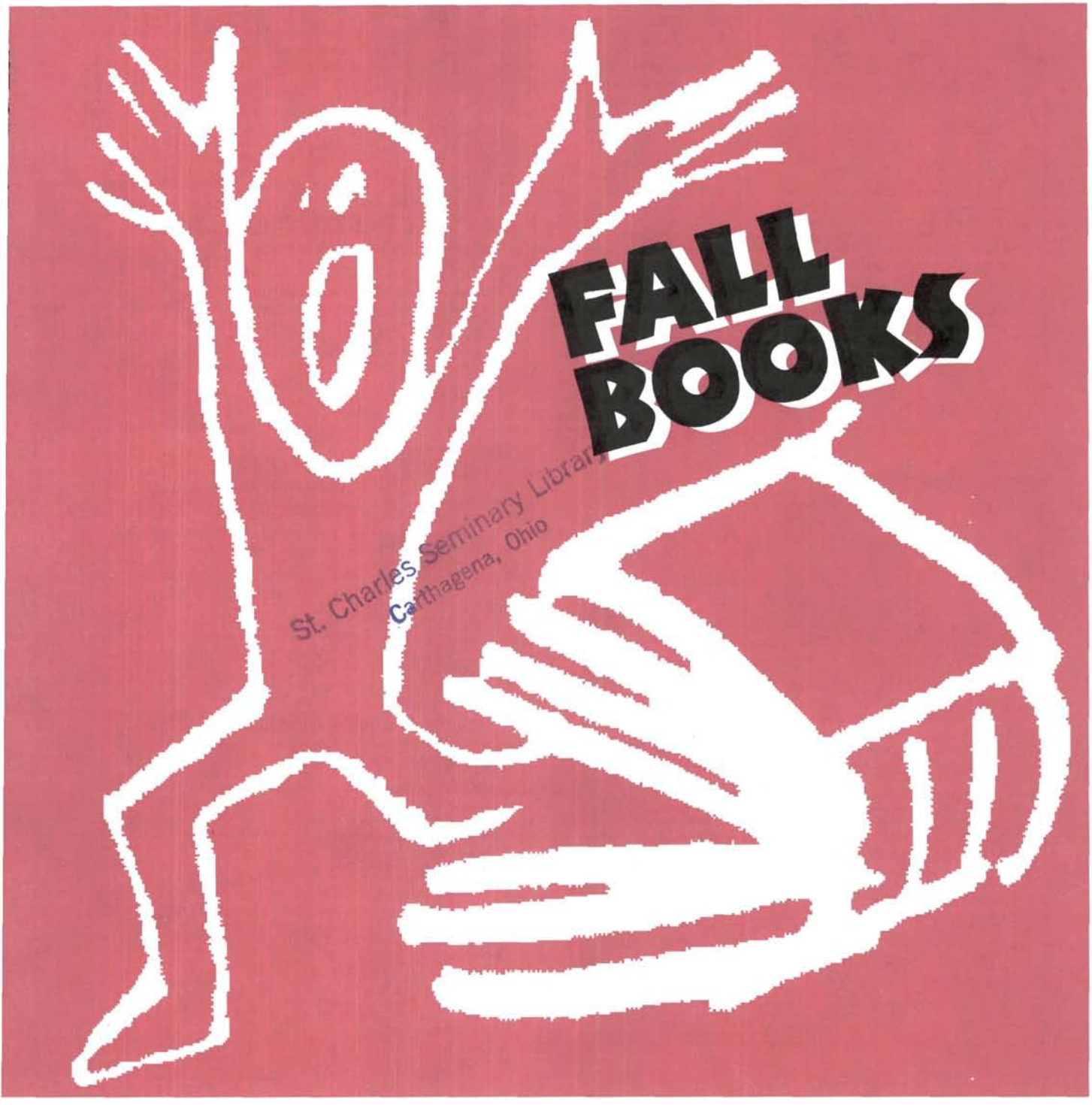

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COMMONWEAL

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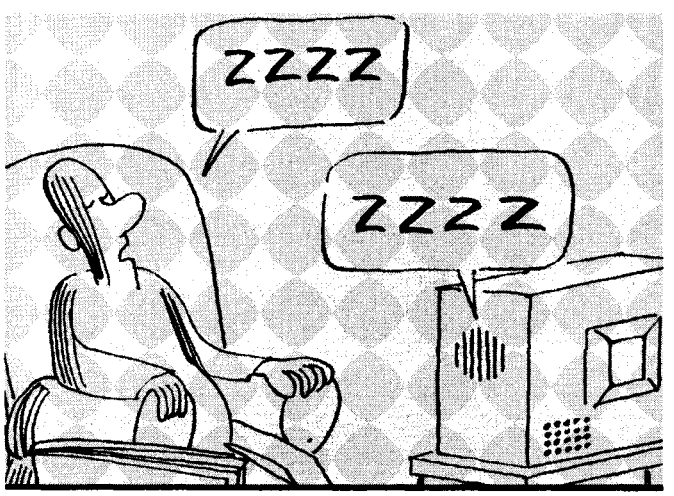

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To the Editors

Funny as hell

The October 6 Et Cetera column, "Caped Crusader Conquers Gotham," was a work of art and insight, and it was funny as hell. I have an idea who wrote it, but I won't tell the Inquisition, should the Holy Father decide to bring it back.

HERBERT GANS
New York, N.Y.

Utterly?

Your October 6 Et Cetera was utterly tasteless and not worthy of *Commonweal.*

Barbara Flynn
Eggerstville, N.Y.

Cancel my subscription

When I started to read the Et Cetera piece on the papal itinerary, I had to turn to the cover to verify that I was not reading a supermarket tabloid. It was the kind of diatribe that might spew forth from that very vulgar commentator, Rush Limbaugh. Catholics who stoop to *ad hominem* attacks on any church leader besmirch themselves. Please cancel my subscription to your tabloid.

NINA FITZPATRICK
College Point, N.Y.

A perishable issue

There is a problem with your issue of October 6: It was so good I had to cut out this part, that part, and so on to send to my children and friends. Please send me another copy (payment enclosed).

I especially enjoyed Sidney Callahan's article, "Let a Smile Be Your Ontology (So Sue Me)." I am often accused of being too happy, and of showing it. I enjoyed the other columns of commentary as well. In Correspondence, I agreed with the letter from John Maher ("Justices as Legislators") that, since we elect our legislators and can "un-elect" them, judges with lifetime tenure should not legislate.

This issue was special, but whenever *Commonweal* arrives in the mail, I drop everything to read it. Keep it up.

MARGARET RANSONE
New Orleans, La.

Getting it right

Thank you for articles like David Loxtercamp's "In the Midst of Death, We Are in Life" and Eric Bauman's "Conversion on the Job" [September 8]. They cut through all the bickering and controversy and show what life is really like for American Catholics in the 1990s.

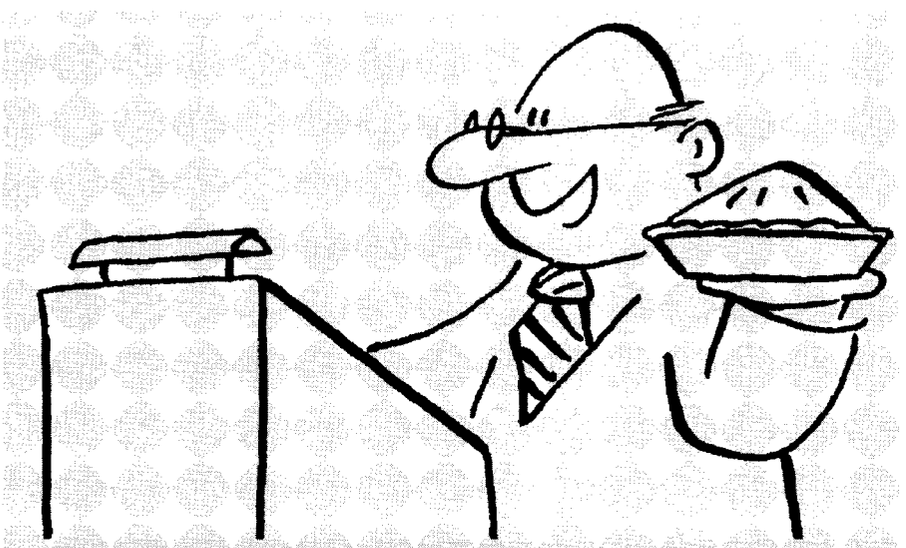
JOHN ROBINSON
Eastchester, N.Y.

Good on Gaillot

Many thanks for Steven Englund's excellent analysis, "L'Affaire Gaillot" [October 6]. Its carefulness, balance, and insight make it a model that, to our great loss, is seldom the norm in our polarized and often superficial Catholic debates. His reflection on contemporary society's "deep need of the transcendent" and the unique resources of the church's tradition to speak to this need clearly applies to the United States as much as to France.

Pope John Paul's recent visit to the United States spoke eloquently to this need. But we all must respond to this grace of the Spirit with deeper prayer and generous abandon in our following of Christ, who alone gives the Spirit without measure. As another recent *Commonweal* article—Eric Bauman's "Conversion on the Job," September 8—movingly reminds us: there is simply no substitute for personal conversion; and no doubt how costly this is.

(REV.) ROBERT P. IMBELLI
Chestnut Hill, Mass.



"As you know, I always like to start off with a little joke...."

Vatican vs. Gaillot

Steven Englund's article on *l'affaire Gaillot* is superb: balanced, fair, and elegantly written. Gaillot makes his fellow lightweight, Matthew Fox, look, by comparison, like a veritable Thomas Aquinas. The Holy See, after putting up for years with a loose cannon that any rationally run enterprise would have jettisoned at once in the interest of damage control, acted in the end with heavyhanded ineptitude strongly reminiscent of its action against Hans Küng at Christmas 1979 (a totally different case, yet similar in this one respect).

(Continued on page 26)

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The revolutionary 104th

During House debate on the budget reconciliation bill, Christopher Shay of Connecticut, formerly a liberal Republican, said that "we will not compromise on [the] basic principle" of a balanced budget in seven years. "This isn't a rebellion," he went on. "A rebellion is a failed revolution. This is a revolution" (*New York Times*, October 14, 1995). That goal is driving the Republican party to cut, to deregulate, and to decentralize government. "Revolution" correctly describes one of the most radical and destabilizing legislative sessions in modern times.

Both in 1992 and in 1994, the minority of the American electorate who went to the polls voted for reform. When President Bill Clinton and a Democratic Congress failed, the mantle of reform fell to Congressman Newt Gingrich and his 100 freshman colleagues. But power is evanescent, time is short, and the Republican House decided to dismantle rather than reshape government. Instead of mending, trimming, patching, and tucking, the revolutionary 104th Congress is ripping apart the social fabric and over eighty years of legislation that established a role for government in helping to maintain the common good. The poorest and the most vulnerable are taking the deepest cuts now, but the revolution will not stop with them.

Consider the federal regulation of nursing homes, which has brought a modest degree of protection to the most vulnerable elderly, who often have no advocates. The nursing home industry wants reform; instead, Mr. Gingrich gives them a revolution: Send regulatory power back to the states, he says. Twenty years ago, when most states wouldn't or couldn't regulate, it became a federal responsibility and conditions improved. Or take the earned-income tax credit, which gives low-income, working men and women a tax break, a bridge to cross from welfare to work and an incentive not to cross back. The Republicans are cutting it. And they are cutting welfare too. On another front: Cuts in Medicare will entice the healthiest seniors into managed-care plans and leave the oldest and sickest Americans to seek care from doctors and hospitals increasingly disinclined to serve them.

All these programs, and others, do need reform; medical-care costs, public and private, do need to be brought more sharply under control. But many of these cuts will in fact finance a tax cut for the wealthiest Americans. A tighter, trimmer government would be good for our politics and our economy—but not if the pain is spread inequitably.

When critics complain of this inequity, Speaker Gingrich accuses them of fomenting class warfare. Shame on them! They should look at the whole picture. Look at Representative Jack Fields's (R-Tex.) bill, which will essentially wipe out Depression-era regulations that protect investors, rein in brokers, and, by the way, build confidence in the market. Down with the Securities and Exchange Commission! Stock-owning Americans, look to your gilt-edged certificates! When even capitalism's safety net is threatened, it is clear that congressional Republicans have more than class warfare in mind: Carry out a deregulatory revolution that will catapult us into the twenty-first century (their slogan), but could actually send us back to the 1930s. We shudder to think that Bill Clinton is all that stands between Americans and Mr. Gingrich's revolutionaries.

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JOHN GARVEY

RACE & THE SIMPSON VERDICT

Taking our pulse

In the days following the Simpson verdict there was a lot of talk about what this decision revealed about the relationship between black and white people in the United States. The more I think about it, even following the Million Man March, the more I have concluded not much. But it highlights something that is not likely to change soon. Race is still a deep problem in America, one too deep for any governmental policy to fix. At the same time, America is one of the few countries that even bothers to see the problem, or to care deeply about trying to change things.

It's rough being black in America, but try being a Turk in Germany or an Algerian Arab in France, or a gypsy in any part of Europe. Only in England could a racist sort like Enoch Powell be dealt with respectfully. How terrible for the home of kidney pie to have to deal with jerk chicken! At least in the United States we take our own pulse enough to know that we are sick, and we occasionally try to take steps to move things in another direction.

That patriotic declaration out of the way, we are a terrible mess. Any American, white or black, who reflects about it can come up with dozens of anecdotes. When I was very small, there were restaurant signs in my hometown of Springfield, Illinois—home of Abraham Lincoln—which said: "We reserve the right to seat our patrons." That meant we will not seat blacks. I remember the deep embarrassment of having to respond to people like the young black man who, when I was in college, talked to me about the strip-tease he liked to go to because all the strippers were white; as well as with black people who were bothered when some people in their families dated or married other people who were *too* black.

A black student at the seminary I attended was stopped once by the police because a bank had been robbed down the street. He answered the description of the robber: black, white shirt and tie, small black case. The police were polite; they took him to the bank, and the teller said that he was not the robber. He told me later—this was post-Rodney King—"Thank God we weren't in L.A.!" He felt he had been dealt with fairly, since in fact he was one of the few people in this Westchester suburb who answered the description. He was also routinely stopped by white cops on upstate highways and the streets of New York: he "fits a profile." I can't help noticing that a disproportionate number of the drivers I see stopped by the police are black or Hispanic, and since everyone in New York drives insanely, this is strange to me.

A woman told me that she did not approve of interracial marriage. I asked her if she meant us—my wife is Asian—and she said, "I don't mean *that*." Asians, she explained, are really white.

Race of this absolutely black-and-white sort is an American invention, no doubt contrived originally to justify making human beings property. It has had a perverse resonance in the Afro-centric studies that make of any Egyptian or North African a black, so that Egyptian culture is seen as totally African, Saint Augustine is African, etc.—and of course, in some continental sense this is true, but irrelevant. What ought to amaze us is the lack of any reference to ideas like "race," used in its modern sense, in the ancient world. Nation and culture mattered, as color did occasionally, but relatively little was mentioned in ancient literature, except in the most fleeting way, about what has become race for us. It is not an ancient and overwhelming reality, but a modern sickness, for the most part invented to justify the form of slavery which was an aftermath of the discovery of the new world, with its odd questions about the real humanity of Indians and Africans.

Our problem is compounded by the current political debate over affirmative action. Though I am as bothered as anyone by numerical quotas based on race, and find it hard to see that the daughter of a black physician is disadvantaged as compared to the son of a white sharecropper, I'm afraid that some people really believe that we would have a "level playing field" if only affirmative action were abolished. The progress made by many black Americans during the past several decades is the result almost entirely of aggressive affirmative-action policies.

The proposal to base affirmative action on class rather than race makes some sense, I think, and will almost certainly go nowhere, because America's dirty little secret, one that lies beneath much of the discussion on race, is class. Gennifer Flowers wasn't taken as seriously as Anita Hill, partly because she seemed like white trash. Relatively few white people would mind living next door to a black dentist or tenured math teacher, but they don't want to live next door to a young black guy who walks with a deliberate limp and carries a boom box, and neither does the black dentist. Fear of the underclass is the subtext to a lot of what passes for discussion on racial issues, but because this involves economic inequality it is not likely to be addressed seriously by either the Democrats or Republicans.

This may be the best argument for a Colin Powell presidency. If he ran as a Republican he could help revive the moderate-to-liberal wing of the party. If he ran as an independent he could frighten both parties, and that would be nice to see. And as the only black man in American history who could conceivably be elected president, he would have a resonance which would be symbolically more important for America than the election of Kennedy was for Catholics. As bad as anti-Catholicism has been, racism has been America's deepest sin from the start, and symbols are essential here, and go to depths that political policies can't touch. □

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Peter Feuerherd

THE CANARY REPORT

Racial poison in New York

I am, not surprisingly for someone with an unpronounceable German name, a white male. Yet when it comes to racial issues in New York City, I am somewhat like the canary they used to send into mines. I frequently get to smell the poison that's out there, all incognito, as a pleasant-enough white guy to whom the melanin-impaired bigots in this city can offer their views in seeming confidence. What they don't know is that, because of circumstances, I'm rooting for the other side.

Because my wife of sixteen years is black and our two teenage children are biracial brown, I take the stings personally, yet quietly, hoping in a way to gauge what racial attitudes really are like in what is often perceived to be the nation's most liberal and tolerant city. That's the perception. But just ask any "person of color" seeking an apartment in central Queens what they might think of that assertion.

On paper, my wife and I would seem to be perfect tenants. She is a librarian, I am a Catholic newspaper editor, professions not exactly conjuring up images of lewd and rowdy lifestyles. For the most basic of three-bedroom apartments, we would be happy to pay $1,200 a month (for those reading in Toledo, that's not a misprint).

But as a family we are poison to the scores of landlords and rental agents we have dealt with. We are frequently ruled out because most apartments, despite laws against the practice, are routinely not rented to families with children (Paging the Christian Coalition: here's a family-values issue we hear precious little about). And then there is the race issue. We have learned that if we are to get anywhere in the apartment-hunting game my pallid complexion will work much better than my wife's darker shade.

When we first moved back to New York five years ago, I was escorted around Queens by a real-estate broker who told me that his job depended on landlords relying on him to screen out blacks and Hispanics. He spoke candidly, maybe too much so. He was a Romanian immigrant, and had long figured out his function in the New York real-estate hierarchy.

Through that broker I eventually landed an apartment, feeling the need to go through the indignity of showing pictures of my family to our new Chinese landlord. He spoke about the need for brotherhood and international harmony in a way which would make the most fevered academic multiculturalist proud. Yet we soon began to feel cramped in what seemed to be an increasingly smaller space as our children grew into adolescence. Sharing the space with roaches and mice didn't help either.

So we began an apartment hunt which has now lasted nearly three years without success. We have been turned away because we have children, seen places that were unlivable, and yes, encountered the racial feelings that seethe beneath the surface of New York's neighborhoods.

One landlady in Flushing told us her apartment was not available. I was suspicious and had a white male friend call her. He was told to come on down and take a look. But the best apartment I saw was with a broker. The landlady, a woman in her seventies, had an indecipherable European accent. As I strolled through the neatly appointed apartment, pleased that finally I had landed a place for my family, a black woman came to the door. She was a potential tenant. She was turned away by the landlady, who looked at the broker and loudly proclaimed, "no coloreds." We still may rent the place—the broker, to his credit, was chagrined by the comment. But, my wife asks me, do we really want to live upstairs from that lady?

A recent *Newsday* story detailed how a Hispanic family, living just a mile or so from where we now reside, was offered a housewarming present of a dead rabbit tied to their door. Of course all that discrimination is illegal. I've even called the city's Civil Rights Commission. I was told to come downtown to file the papers, which would mean taking a full day off work to pursue my complaint. My energies, I figure, are best spent seeking out a decent apartment, not engaging in litigation.

Think what you want about affirmative action, but my experience shows that one of the arguments raised against it is entirely bogus. That one is that traditional racial discrimination is something out of a bygone past, the only scar on Newt's, Rush's, and Ozzie and Hariett's idyllic fifties. "Get over it," black Americans are told.

The neoconservatives' favorite black writer, Shelby Steele, recently wrote in a *New York Times* piece that he is opposed to affirmative action but would like to see criminal sanctions imposed on those who discriminate on racial grounds. It is a tempting proposal; but I don't see politicians such as New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, the champion of small home owners and landlords, standing still while the elderly Queens landlady I dealt with is carted off to Rikers Island. It isn't likely to happen.

Meanwhile, I find myself distrustful of white brokers and landlords, knowing that many do not want my children or my wife around. And the political leaders in this city, both white and black, see segregated neighborhoods as a kind of natural selection which shall remain undisturbed, an arrangement with which elites in both communities have grown comfortable.

We are likely to continue in what the psychobabblists call denial, even if, on the housing front in Queens in 1995, the racial poison is still there for anyone who wants to sniff it out. □

Peter Feuerherd *is assistant editor of the* Long Island Catholic *and national affairs writer for the* National Catholic Register.

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MIDWESTERN LONELINESS

The novels of Jon Hassler

Joseph Hynes

Loneliness depends upon one's sense of place. To light up this assertion with respect to the novels of Jon Hassler, I first want to look at two brief snippets from James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Both excerpts are from the first chapter, where the schoolboy Stephen Dedalus writes down a formula and his friend Fleming writes him a short poem. Both are efforts to establish Stephen's identity in the larger frame of things. First Stephen writes:

Stephen Dedalus
Class of Elements
Clongowes Wood College
Sallins
County Kildare
Ireland
Europe
The World
The Universe.

Shortly thereafter Fleming writes this quatrain for Stephen:

Stephen Dedalus is my name,
Ireland is my nation.
Clongowes is my dwellingplace
And heaven my expectation.

The first excerpt evokes the kind of hierarchical placing many of us have attempted, not necessarily in our childhood. It is essentially a secular ladder showing both the writer's uniqueness and his insignificance, depending upon which end of the ladder one starts from. The individual is both singular self and insignificant speck.

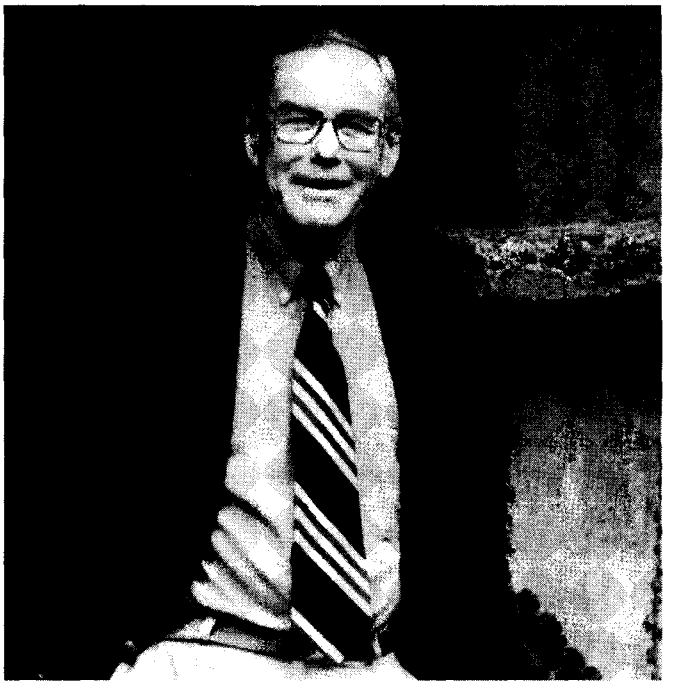
The quatrain is also hierarchical, but it moves from the secular to the sacred and thereby proffers a real difference from the first ladder. Indeed, the whole Christian promise is implicit in these few lines, which suggest to Stephen, as a Catholic, not only that he has temporal and eternal places, but that he *matters* in the omniscient view of things.

So where do these two jottings get us on the subject of loneliness? The first excerpt suggests that loneliness can be a sort of cosmic isolation that inevitably attends upon us unless we can independently convince ourselves of our own value. I think here of a recent memoir of E. B. White, wherein Linda H. Davis reports that White spent his last year having his own writings read to him ("The Man on the Swing," the *New Yorker*, December 27, 1993). The second excerpt suggests that "long loneliness" which, according to Dorothy Day, is our lifetime of working and waiting to reach heaven and the creator of our assured human worth.

Joyce, then, offers these two extremes: me here and now *versus* me now and forever. Most of us, of course, fall somewhere between these extremes. We either try to accommodate secular and sacred, or we work for secular significance in the realm of other people only.

Hassler is a Minnesota Catholic who writes about Stephen Dedalus's extremes of place and thus about a range of loneliness. Very much like J. F. Powers, his colleague at Saint John's University in Collegeville, Hassler develops plots and characters concerned with both Joycean goals, which obviously are not always mutually exclusive. Like Powers, in such books as *Morte d'Urban* and several collections of stories, Hassler usually builds fictions around his Catholic faith, though not exclusively around priest-protagonists. And because the human condition, however perceived, assures some measure of displacement and loneliness, these qualities occur in Hassler's books.

In fact Hassler makes it tough for his characters to *avoid* loneliness. Although, for example, his priests are good priests, they are placed in drab locales with hardly a soul



Joseph Hynes *teaches modern literature at the University of Oregon. His publications include* The Art of the Real: Muriel Spark's Novels *(1988) and* Critical Essays on Muriel Spark *(1992).*

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to confide in. Father James O'Hannon, in both *A Green Journey* (1985) and *Dear James* (1993), writes letters from his village parish north of Dublin to the spinster Agatha McGee in Staggerford, Minnesota. They are both in their sixties and plainly eager if not desperate to find soulmates. Instinctively, James conceals from Agatha the fact of his priesthood. Although their correspondence is perfectly in keeping with his promise of celibacy and with anyone's sense of propriety, Agatha inevitably builds more into the friendship than it will bear, and is deeply hurt when she discovers the truth of James's vocation. Eventually the bridge is repaired and these two establish a genuine friendship. She sheds bitterness and again functions as a charitable Staggerfordian, while he goes on the road to preach peace between the two Irelands.

Agatha and James manifest both of Joyce's excerpts. On the one hand, they sometimes grow tired of their small-town environments, concerning which Hassler pulls no punches. On the other hand, they are both content in the end with exactly those places. What enables them to be contented with (not blind to) their small towns is their open acceptance of the truth of who they are and the hands they have been both dealt and chosen. As a result their secular activities are again in sync with the Christian goals they had permitted, in their temporary self-absorption, to become a bit rusty.

In *North of Hope* (1990), Father Frank Healy, another provincial Minnesotan, is also tested. Healy, in his forties, has spent twenty years teaching in a seminary. When it closes, he is assigned to the chancery office. After a few months he realizes that for the entirety of his priesthood he has never known the day-to-day work of a parish priest. In other words, he thinks that his vocation has never been tested. He's right. The book tests his celibacy and his ability to back up his academic abstractions with some hands-dirtying, one-on-one attention to the spiritual and material needs of an Ojibway reservation and his town parish. Such involvement removes his sense of being cut off in loneliness and convinces him he's chosen the right line of work. He also learns that friendship with a woman—just as in the case of Agatha and James—can be consistent with his celibacy.

Joseph Hynes's critical essay on Jon Hassler is another in our series of articles on contemporary Catholic writers of fiction. We have asked our essayists to give an overview of the author's work, showing our readers where and how this writer locates the central human drama, the big questions, the religious crisis of our time. What does the Catholic sensibility of Jon Hassler tell us about our common world, about the state of our souls? The most recently published article in the series was written by Harold Isbell on John Logan (May 5, 1995).

Even where priestly celibacy is not an issue, however, we may note that heterosexual relationships—the only kind Hassler gives us—are few in number and range from virtually nonexistent to difficult to peripheral. Thus, loneliness is just that much more likely and prominent. For example, Miles Pruitt, the central figure of *Staggerford* (1977), Hassler's first novel, is a bachelor high-school teacher in his mid-thirties, and he seems content with his small-town lot. His two romantic interests have married other men, one of these his brother, and the woman currently pursuing Miles is impossible. He is a virtual orphan, without family or intimate friends, and for ten years he has not practiced his religion. Yet, at the time of his shockingly sudden death he has made a first move back to Catholicism and has quietly earned the respect and gratitude of the community for his dedication to his students, in and outside of school.

Miles's notebooks, to which only he and the reader are privy, modestly but clearly show a man who cares about others irrespective of what happens to himself or of the religious belief that supports him. The notebooks in fact make sense of his otherwise incomprehensible comment to the thickheaded football coach that "a tie is as good as a win." This assertion really clarifies a great deal in Hassler's books and it means at least two things: (1) works without faith can help others and make your life count; and (2) if you can just hold your own against all the stuff coming down on your head, that's victory enough.

Obviously, the Lombardi-like coach won't sit still for a suggestion that kissing one's sister is emotionally adequate, and Hassler's sense of humor is off and running. But as the notebooks show us, teaching high-school students and working unobtrusively to empathize with them, constitutes Miles's way of beating loneliness and the temptation to think exclusively of himself. In short, whether or not at the end of his life Miles was recovering his faith, he conquered apparent loneliness in his very small town by giving himself to others—in the manner of an unordained priest. If *Staggerford* is not a comedy in the usual generic sense—if it does not lead to a happy ending on society's own terms—that is because Hassler's premises, like those of Joyce's quatrain, go beyond the usual comic range. Some people only seem to be lonely.

Similar observations inform *Simon's Night* (1979). Simon Shea, at seventy-six, is long-retired from his locally distinguished career as a poet and professor of English at Rookery State, near Staggerford. His life, and the relevance in it of Joyce's excerpts, can be laid out on parallel tracks. On the track analogous to Joyce's hierarchical ladder, Simon has enjoyed success and gained at least statewide fame as teacher and writer. His brief married life was interrupted about thirty-five years earlier when his wife ran off with another man. Neither Simon nor his wife has sought a divorce—she out of indifference and he out of his Catholic conviction of the permanence of marriage. About twenty years ago Simon had a brief idyllic affair with a former student, but has otherwise

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remained celibate. He rents out his rural cabin and moves to a retirement home in town, afraid that he's losing his grip and may not be able to manage any longer on his own. The book's title describes his demoralized condition.

On the parallel track—denoting Joyce's quatrain—Simon has remained a Catholic believer all his life, and consistently reads himself and events from this overarching point-of-view as well as from a secular stance. Indeed, one of the creative joys of the novel is Simon's praying. The manner is always that of personal conversations with God as both superior and friend. Simon is alternately grateful, loving, needful, contrite, puzzled, and inquiring. Notably, he is not angry, maudlin, despairing, self-pitying, or demanding. That is, he believes in God and feels close to him, but knows his own place as creature. To pull this off without being cute or slavish or drippingly pious seems to me one of Hassler's remarkable achievements. Hassler brings his parallel tracks to a comic terminal in this instance. His title derives from some Wallace Stevens lines used as epigraph:

After the final no there comes a yes
And on that yes the future world depends.
No was the night.

Stevens's night and his "yes" and "no" are strictly secular, while Hassler's (and Simon's) bring to mind the Christian's familiar dark night of the soul. Some new friends enable Simon to see that he's not past it, that life and people are still interesting and worthwhile, and that he can still be profitably involved and creative. His wife, successful but bored, decides to come back, thus terminating an instance of *coitus interruptus* that broke endurance records set by Molly and Leopold Bloom and even by Penelope and Odysseus, and Simon sets out to write the autobiography his publisher has long requested of him. Simon says "yes" and society's track one coincides with Joyce's track-two. Curiously, loneliness can be next to godliness.

Books discussed in this essay

Staggerford
Ballantine, $5.99, 304 pp.
Simon's Night
Ballantine, $5.99, 320 pp.
The Love Hunter
Ballantine, $5.99, 336 pp.
A Green Journey
Ballantine, $5.99, 292 pp.
Grand Opening
Ballantine, $5.99, 326 pp.
North of Hope
Ballantine, $5.99, 435 pp.
Dear James
Ballantine, $6.99, 429 pp.
Rookery Blues
Ballantine, $23, 484 pp.

Sometimes, of course, this juxtaposition is more difficult to find or effect or be assured of. *Grand Opening* (1987) in many ways comes closest among Hassler's novels to Joyce's ladder. In the last year of World War II the Fosters—Hank, Catherine, their twelve-year-old son, Brendan, and Catherine's father—move from Minneapolis to the town of Plum. They hope to revive a small grocery store they have bought and to establish roots in the community. Catherine yearns for Minneapolis and detests Plum.

The loneliness in this novel is not exclusively Catherine's. It is to be found as well in three young men not of her family. One of these is Paul Dimmitburg, who is experiencing trouble with his Lutheran seminary studies because he cannot understand how God can put up with the denominational bickering and meanness, the lack of charity, on view in Plum. Thus he's taking some time off to confront this loneliness—the kind of doubt touched on in Joyce's quatrain.

The second young man is Dodger Hicks, Brendan's contemporary and a waif in the Dickensian mold. Dodger is, like Miles Pruitt, a virtual orphan and is befriended by the Fosters, on whom he comes to depend for life and hope. His loneliness is prominent and heart-wrenching.

Wallace Flint, about twenty, is the third young man. He is indirectly responsible for killing Dodger, whom he hates because the Fosters like Dodger. Wallace is eaten up with bitterness and hatred toward everyone because his epilepsy has induced his mother to keep him home in Plum when his need is to go to college on the scholarship he has earned. The smallness of the town merely heightens his lonely malice toward anyone who has what he cannot have.

Surrounding all this provincial battling are the concluding events of World War II in 1944-45. Young Brendan, as the novel's central intelligence, registers events near and far, and the book's title, *Grand Opening*, reflects not only the grocery store's big moment but Brendan's moral awakening, his initiation into the problem of evil. And indeed this is where Hassler once again carries concern with loneliness beyond a narrow sense of place and into Joyce's quatrain.

Obviously, moving to the anonymity and cultural richness of the big city and signing global peace treaties to end a war will not solve the problem of evil or answer Job's "Why?" Bright lights, college courses, economic development, advances in science and the arts—these are among the good things traditionally and understandably sought by protagonists of *Bildungsromane*, whether set in Minnesota or elsewhere. But achieving such good things cannot begin to address the problem of evil—why it persists beyond our awareness of degrees of separation, and how it might be solved. As Paul Dimmitburg knows, the local institutional churches seem to contribute to this problem rather than strive to cope with and perhaps alleviate it. The events of the year serve as a rite of passage for Brendan, who will have to think about such formidable things as sin, faith, and grace as he readjusts to the city.

If, as Stephen Carter argues, we live in a "culture of disbelief," some readers are perhaps more at home with Hassler's *The Love Hunter* (1981) than with his other books. For this is a novel wherein religious and theological issues matter only in the breach. This is a book rooted in Sartrean existentialism and situation ethics, and it explores what we can or must

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do when making moral choices in a milieu where disbelief is as normal as cholesterol.

Chris MacKensie, a divorced loner, forms a genuine triangular friendship with Larry and Rachel Quinn. Both men work at Rookery State College until Larry's multiple sclerosis forces an early retirement. Even as Chris continues to befriend Larry and visit with him faithfully, Chris and Rachel fall in love with each other. When Larry declares his wish to die before his multiple sclerosis becomes more pronounced, Chris decides to take Larry duck-hunting in Canada and to kill him there. Chris justifies this decision on the ground that he is thinking of Larry rather than of any subsequent benefits for himself and Rachel—whom he does not tell of his reasoning and decision.

In the event, Larry is revitalized by the trip and Chris is truly glad for him: thus Chris's original choice would seem to have been authentic, in Sartre's terms, rather than selfish. But the book nevertheless stresses how strangely "distant" Canada feels to Chris, who is clearly on his existential own in confronting his choice and its possible consequences. In the end we and Chris have to wonder how Chris's unfulfilled determination will influence any future relationship with Rachel, especially in light of the novel's epigraph from *Othello*: "That death's unnatural that kills for loving." Whose death? Larry's or Chris's?

As in *The Love Hunter*, so in Hassler's current novel, *Rookery Blues* (1995), there is not a religious bone in any character's body. Novel-time is 1969, at Rookery State, seemingly the sad-sack member of the Minnesota State College system, and indeed the omniscient narrator glances incidentally at Simon Shea, Larry and Rachel Quinn, and "an academic counselor named Mackensie" (now sporting a lower-case "k"), all of them encountered in previous visits to this Hassler campus.

The action, however, focuses on five other faculty members in their connections to the book's title and to one another, a musical quintet. Peggy Benoit (sax and vocals) teaches music while trying to get over her brief marriage and her disappointment at not teaching at Brown or Middlebury. Connor, whose first name never appears, plays bass, displays genius as a painter while he fights off alcohol, tries to adjust to a wife who hates him and a daughter who loves both him and her mother (but on her own terms), and anguishes with Peggy over what to do about their passionate affair. These two are perhaps first among equals. The others are Neil Novotny (clarinet), who teaches English badly and whose novel-writing is even worse; Leland Edwards (piano), whose teaching of English is dedicated if uninspired, and whose musical skill makes him the leader of the Icejam Quintet; and Victor Dash (drums), whose courses in business English barely divert him from his efforts to organize a faculty union and inspire a successful strike.

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Hassler offers a range of student abilities and townee quirkiness, the 1960s faculty problem of how to cope with marginal male students whose failure will mean a trip to Vietnam, and an intimate look at domestic and departmental campus politics. The heart of the book, however, is the interrelationships of the quintet as manifestations of the book's title and five song-title section-headings: "These Foolish Things," "I'll Get By," "Mood Indigo," "Don't Blame Me," and "My Blue Heaven." To weight this "blues" theme, Hassler writes an italicized four-or-five-page biographical bit for each member of the quintet, thereby implying how he or she got to be this way—usually a sad and needy way.

In the end the strike fails, Connor reverts to the better job he had left, Neil leaves academe to write grocery-store romances, Victor joyfully resigns (before he is fired) to become a union organizer, Peggy and Leland stay at Rookery State as a duo with hopes of adding new musicians, and Connor and Peggy share beds in two locales while Connor's marriage persists nominally and his daughter's future worries him.

The book, then, is not one of Hassler's comedies, but one of his bittersweet ironies, wherein things merely go on as well as they can. Still, his humor helps things along (as always), for characters and readers alike, even as the quintet's playing both embodies and transcends their miseries. The humor shows up, for example, when the Signage Committee (*sic*), resenting its silly mission, selects as the institution's motto these words: "Rookery State College/ Paul Bunyan's Alma Mater." Leland's mother weeps with laughter and asks "What sort of student was Mr. Bunyan, I wonder. What was his major?"

"I can have Mrs. Kibbee [his secretary] look it up for you," said the dean, causing a hush to fall over the room. He wondered why everyone including his wife was suddenly gaping at him as though he'd said something brilliant. "It's not fair to the alumni as a whole to single out one in particular who's become famous," he said.

All of Hassler's books enmesh their protagonists in the questions, "Who am I?", "Where am I?", "Where am I going?", and "What does it mean to be lonely?" And ironic wit and charity keep loneliness in its place in a world shown to be a vale of both tears and laughter. Of these eight novels only *The Love Hunter* and *Rookery Blues* decline a distinction between being "in" the world and being "of" the world. The *two* regard this world as the fullness of reality. Hassler's other fictions clearly or implicitly make the "in"-*vs*.-"of" distinction as they balance the two Joycean excerpts and make life merely qualifiedly lonely, sometimes more meaningful, sometimes simpler, usually more complex, and always morally mysterious.

Despite the sometimes funereal tone of these remarks, I want to sound the concluding note that a dominant mystery about Jon Hassler is how he can be one of the funniest serious writers alive. This fact doubtless accounts for his popularity as he goes about the serious business of grappling with our abiding loneliness. □

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MICHAEL WARNER

Foreword by George Weigel

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Michael Warner is a historian who since 1992 has worked with the history staff of the Central Intelligence Agency. Before that he served as an analyst in the CIA's Directorate of Intelligence. He is the editor of *The CIA under Harry Truman* and holds a doctorate in history from the University of Chicago. George Weigel is the president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

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TRYING TO SEE STRAIGHT

Flannery O'Connor & the business of writing

Timothy P. Schilling

October 6, 1959: People are always asking me if I am a Catholic writer and I am afraid that I sometimes say no and sometimes say yes, depending entirely on who the visitor is.

It was a frequent complaint in the letters of Flannery O'Connor (1925–64) that "The silence of the Catholic critic is so often preferable to his attention" (November 6, 1955). And, "I always look in the Catholic magazines my mother reads, to see if my book has been reviewed and when I find it hasn't, I say an act of thanksgiving."

Though O'Connor might have cringed at what follows, she has given us too much for us to refrain from speaking of her and her work. Her generosity would not long begrudge us even our misreadings.

Besides her novels, short stories, and essays, which are jewels, we have her letters (*The Habit of Being*, Vintage). These are, for me, the most satisfying of O'Connor's works, perhaps because they give us the most direct access to her life. In these we most closely approach her views on the business of writing—a business that was for her indistinguishable from the spiritual life itself. In 1955 (August 2), she writes:

> One of the awful things about writing when you are Christian is that for you the ultimate reality is the Incarnation, the present reality is the Incarnation, the whole reality is the Incarnation, and nobody believes in the Incarnation; that is, nobody in your audience. My audience are the people who think God is dead. At least these are the people I am conscious of writing for.

Though she was aware of writing for those for whom God is dead, it is certainly true that many of her readers turn to her precisely because of her belief in the Incarnation. They too, believe, however half-heartedly, and find—at least I do—that O'Connor offers sane and good-humored guidance for professed Christians.

This isn't the sort of responsibility she bargained for when she started writing. In her letter of January 17, 1956, she speaks of her task (somewhat reluctantly) as being concerned with "the accurate naming of the things of God." She continues, "I don't mean it's an accomplishment. It's only trying to see straight and it's the least you can ask for. You ask God to let you see straight and write straight."

Later (on August 6, 1957) she comes to a more explicit understanding of the responsibility she has to her readers—prompted by an exchange with one of *America*'s editors (her essay "The Church and the Fiction Writer" was published there, March 30, 1957):

> I had said that the responsibility...of the artist was to his art. Now it seems to me that he [the editor] is correct but that some explanation should be given of how the artist's responsibility for souls operates. Is it, for instance, the same in kind as the responsibility of the church, is it to children, to idiots, to old ladies, to fifteen-year-old girls, to unbalanced people?....I think he just sees this as an abstract theoretical problem and from a great distance. Whereas the writer himself is traveling the rocky road, and feels every individual bump.

Perhaps it is this closing of distance that is most essential in O'Connor's art. To "write straight," in full cognizance of the reality of the Incarnation, is to respect the specificity and dailiness of life. O'Connor speaks of "Christian realism," and says that "there is nothing harder or less sentimental" than this.

Her letters show us her refusal to seek a truth that stands apart from the concrete and local. "The artist dreams no

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John Nixon, Jr.

The Precisionist

"And that was that," she said, whamming the nail
Precisely on its idiomatic head.
Not "*this* was that" or (changing number) "these
Were those." She left such ambiguities
To those with wobbly vision and with frail
Or timid muscles. "That was that," she said.

dreams. That is precisely what he does not do..." (April 20, 1957). Rather, in her writing and in her farm work (raising "peachickens" in Milledgeville, Georgia), she busies herself with what is immediate, and necessary. Some of the most entertaining passages in her letters concern her "peafowl." Dogs and peachickens do not mix, she tells us. Her yard sounds like a jungle at night; and the birds do mostly what they want. "They have no proper sense of place; we have a very nice lawn that they could decorate to advantage but they prefer to sit on the tractors or the top of the chicken house or the garbage-can lid" (July 16, 1957).

Such observations are in keeping with O'Connor's belief that the artist's work is conditioned by a reality that is given: "Ultimately, you write what you *can*, what God gives you" (November 6, 1955). The creative act of the artist does not replace the creative act of God: rather, the artist participates in a creative power that is of God. The art produced, then, is as much "discovered" as it is constructed. She writes on October 27, 1957:

> I always have an idea of what I want to do when I write a story, but whether I'll be able to remains always to be seen. I am writing a story now and have proceeded at a regular rate of two pages a day, following my nose more or less. They have to work out some way or other, and I think you discover a good deal more in the process when you don't have too definite ideas about what you want to do.

She hated "pious language" for its disrespect of the mystery that is already present in things. She distrusted "academic" approaches to literature for the same reason. When asked why the Misfit's hat was *black* in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, she replied that "most countrymen in Georgia wore black hats." When pressed for the significance of the hat, she said that it was "to cover his head."

That same realism (and hatred of sentimentality) applied also in the matter of her own bad health. If one reads the letters chronologically, there are increasing indications of the decline in her condition (she suffered from lupus), but they are incidental signs: matter-of-fact mentions of blood transfusions, hospital visits, apologies for not having had the energy to write. On September 30, 1955, she writes:

> My being on the crutches is not an accident or the energy-depriving ailment either but something that has been coming on in the top of the leg bone, a softening of it on acct. of a failure of the circulation to the hip. They say if I keep the weight off it entirely for a year or two, it may harden up again; otherwise in my old age I will be charging people from my wheel chair or have to have a steel plate put on it. Anyway, it is not as great an inconvenience for me as it would be for somebody else, as I am not the sporty type. I don't run around or play games. My greatest exertion and pleasure these last years has been throwing the garbage to the chickens and I can still do this, though I am in danger of going with it.

Still, it is moving to come to the end of these letters and see how they get shorter. She goes on signing her letters comically: Tarbutter, Tarpot, Tarbug—all variations on her "Tarwater" in *The Violent Bear It Away*. But in her letter of July 21, 1964, just two weeks before her death, she signs herself "Tarweary."

Flannery O'Connor's concerns were theological, in the best sense of that word. She wrote, "I'm no theologian, but all this is vital to me, and I feel it's vital to you" (December 23, 1959). It *is* vital. We profit by her example of faith. □

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Richard Alleva

DENZEL WASHINGTON: HOME OWNER

'Devil in a Blue Dress'

When Denzel Washington, playing the neophyte detective Easy Rawlins, gets punched on the side of the head by a racist cop during an interrogation, he does something no movie private eye, white or black, has ever done. He yelps. It's a cry of fear and pain and, most of all, outraged dignity. He's knocked all the way to the other side of the room, and when his attacker and another policeman close in with questions and taunts, Easy stutters his replies. But when he's struck again, the young black man fights back so fiercely that the bigot's partner, playing "good cop," has to intervene and calm down both men for the sake of continuing the investigation. That yelp, that stutter, that flurry of fists, express so much of Rawlins's character—his daunting knowledge of what white men feel free to do to blacks, the courage that persists in defiance of that knowledge, his surprisingly unquenched capacity for being outraged by the world's injustice—that, days after seeing *Devil in a Blue Dress*, I am still struck with admiration at the way Washington managed to show so much of Easy Rawlins in a few seconds.

This Walter Mosley creation, though the hero of an ongoing series set in that classic *film noir* territory, the Los Angeles of 1948 (subsequent mysteries are set in subsequent decades), isn't a typical *film noir* hero. Easy is no Humphrey Bogart stoic who responds to threats and batterings with sneers and wisecracks. Nor is he a Shaft with the fires of black revolution burning in his eyes. Rawlins has agreed to track down a woman for a white politician only because he's got mortgage payments to meet and has just lost his regular job. This is his first case and he knows he's in over his head, but the mortgage payments—and a streak of obstinacy—keep him on the case. Easy is no superman—his very name seems to admit it—but he's an everyman with guts.

Near the beginning of the movie, director Carl Franklin gives us more than one long shot of that perfectly ordinary little house that Easy is struggling to maintain while many of his neighbors are heading back to the South or up to the Northeast in search of work. The front of the house is photographed in a mellow, simmering light that tells us that this is Easy's safe harbor in a dangerous world. While running down leads, he will encounter several blacks who long ago gave up any ambition to own a chunk of the earth (if they ever had such a dream) and instead have burrowed into various expedient crevices, defending their turfs with whatever means necessary and striking deals with predatory whites for the sake of survival or profit. It's the (believable) conceit of this story that the black characters can serve as go-betweens, messengers, and paladins for the whites because (as one white gangster puts it) a black "takes a risk every time he walks out his front door." If your life is in danger on a daily basis, why not take a few more risks and turn a profit? Easy may or may not hold this sentiment himself, but he has a gallant nostalgia for tranquillity, security, hearth, and home. And it's the satisfying irony of Mosley's story that the "devil in a blue dress" whom he is paid to find and who seems to be a classic *film noir* dame, turns out to have at least one thing in common with Easy: she, too, is seeking a safe harbor.

In 1992, Carl Franklin made the best American movie of the year, *One False Move* (yes, it was even better than *Unforgiven*). A thriller about three crimi-

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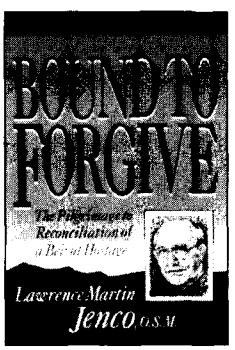

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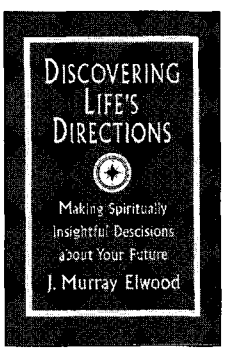

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nals headed for a showdown with three police officers in a sleepy Southern town, it prolonged for ninety racking minutes all the dread that's packed into the last few seconds preceding a car collision. But *Move* also had subtleties of characterization and social observation, plus great acting and a directorial style that recalled James Agee's description of John Huston: "His style is practically invisible as well as practically universal in its possible good uses; it is the most virile movie style I know of...."

Devil in a Blue Dress is both simpler and more complicated than *One False Move*. The characterizations and social insights of the new film lack the complexities of *Move*. Yet, because *Devil* is a detective story, not a psychological thriller like *Move*, it has all sorts of complications of circumstantiality—who went where at what time with whom?—that have to be sorted out in the last twenty minutes. And so, aside from the climactic gunplay, those twenty minutes are the least gripping in the movie. I like detective stories more than Edmund Wilson did, but his attack on them in his essay, "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?", contained one just complaint: after pages and pages of powerfully poetic writing in a Raymond Chandler novel, the reader is stuck with sorting out timetables and alibis at the conclusion. Cinematically transposed, that goes for *Devil in a Blue Dress*. Granted, Walter Mosley's story (adapted by Franklin) relates all the plotty little details to the main theme of individuals seeking their niches in a race-divided society, and that the director keeps nearly all the action lucid (*Devil* is coherent), still, after ninety minutes of excellent entertainment, *Devil* abruptly ceases to be interesting.

There is one other problem. Don Cheadle has been greatly praised for his performance as Mouse, Easy's psychopathic sidekick. The role *is* excitedly conceived by Mosley as the unbridled *id* of the hero. Easy has sublimated his rage at injustice into a pattern of behavior founded on reason and dignified compromise; Mouse is willing to kill anybody who gets in his way, yet he's always on Easy's side. Franklin has preserved the disturbing ambiguity of this friendship in his script, but Don Cheadle lacks the coiled rattlesnake quality that Mouse must have.

Still, this is one of those movies with faults that fade in the memory soon after viewing while the better moments linger. If there are more Easy Rawlins movies—and who can doubt it?—it will be a pleasure to spend more time in the company of Denzel Washington. □

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SUMMER 1996

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The stench of Woburn

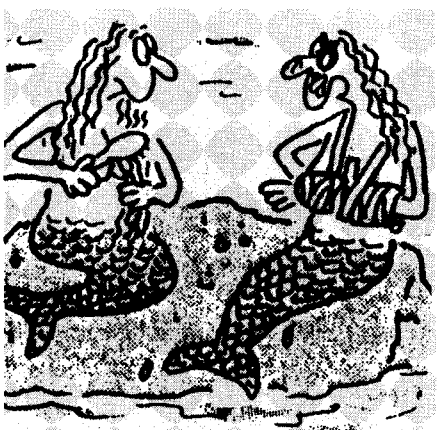
A Civil Action
Jonathan Harr
Random House, $25, 500 pp.

Suzanne Keen

In *A Civil Action*, Jonathan Harr has written a gripping and engrossing book that reads like a novel, but commands attention in the way that only the very best nonfiction can. For two-and-a-half days, I read *A Civil Action* in every spare evening, hour, and minute. Not since Randy Shilts's tour-de-force, *And the Band Played On*, obliterated a long weekend six years ago has a work of nonfiction so compelled me to drop everything except the book itself. Reading Shilts's chronicle of the early years of the AIDS epidemic, I marveled at how the author managed to create a sense of suspense—when I knew perfectly well that the story would only grow worse and worse as the pages turned. Harr has accomplished a similar feat in telling the story of a highly publicized civil suit that pitted a group of citizens and their young personal injury lawyer against the two huge corporations (Beatrice and W. R. Grace) believed responsible for the contamination of the water in Woburn, Massachusetts, with toxic chemicals.

Even if you missed the story on "60 Minutes" years ago, you know within pages of beginning this book that the children die of leukemia; that the lawyer who takes on their families' cases against the corporations gives nearly a decade of his career for an $8-million out-of-court settlement with W. R. Grace (Beatrice was exonerated) that leaves him bankrupt and homeless; and that the corporations subsequently held accountable by the EPA for the contamination of Woburn's water avoid admitting responsibility. Harr creates suspense by adeptly combining two genres familiar from television and movies (courtroom drama and investigative journalism) with a psychological study that succeeds because it is so novelistic. With television producers so eager to knock off quickie reenactments of our crimes and scandals, using the furlongs of videotape filmed by news crews and camera-toting bystanders, the difference of *A Civil Action* is striking.

Harr writes his story as if he were inside the heads of his characters, rather than slavishly reproducing the TV news, video version of events that stands for "lifelike" in contemporary culture. The author is uniquely qualified to provide this insider's view of the personalities of the lawyers, the process of trying the case, and the hair-raising account of the effects of a judge's influence, because Jonathan Harr followed the case from before the start of the trial. And he followed it from the inside, attending the meetings and strategy sessions, inspecting the documents and financial records, and coming to know the victims and their lawyers over years of preparation and litigation.



"I got caught up in a water dispute."

His research did not end when the case finally came to its conclusion, for then Harr began the in-depth interviewing that enables him to present an equally rich picture of the lawyers for the defense (the corporations), the antagonists of the piece. Though the book clearly takes the view that the industrial solvent trichlorethylene (TCE) in Woburn's water explains the cluster of leukemias, as well as a variety of other ailments suffered by residents of the neighborhood served by the poisoned wells, Harr's story focuses less on the tragic illnesses that instigate the investigation and the case, and more on the convoluted turns of the litigation itself.

Since we know, more or less, how the story turns out, Harr's success lies to a large degree in the wide range of characters presented in-depth, as a novelist relies on contrasting perspectives to complicate a plot. While never swerving in its sympathy for Jan Schlichtmann, the flashy, spendthrift young personal injury lawyer who takes on the Woburn case—the "black hole" no one else wants to touch—Harr's narrative also presents the strategies and motivations of Cheeseman and Facher, the lawyers defending Beatrice and W. R. Grace, with a fascinating account of their skills and weaknesses, their brilliant and dubious stratagems, and their manipulation of the judge and jury.

The suspense that makes *A Civil Action* such a page-turner lies in Harr's treatment of paired motifs: water and money. The book opens in 1986 with the repossession of Jan Schlichtmann's Porsche. Too broke for a cab, the lawyer walks to work from his Beacon Hill condo. He rebuffs a homeless panhandler:

> In a technical sense he was close to being homeless himself. His condominium association had just filed a lawsuit against him for failing to

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make a single maintenance payment for the last six months. He was also in arrears on his first, second, and third mortgages. By the time the jury had started deliberating, after seventy-eight days of trial, all the money was gone. "You're living on vapor," [the firm's financial manager] had told Schlichtmann and his partners

Having alerted us to the financial ruin that will occur if the jury does not go Schlichtmann's way, Harr moves twenty years into the past, where the neighbors in East Woburn "talk among themselves about the water the way most other people would talk about the weather." Murky, smelly, and rust-colored, the water pumped between 1964 and 1979 from the wells serving East Woburn confutes our ideas of what water ought to be—to read of people chilling it, boiling it, mixing it with powdered flavorings in order to drink it is to enter, through homely details, a horror story.

If water is poison, Harr complicates our normal associations of the other substance flowing through the book: the lawyers' money. If the aim of the case is to extract enough compensation money from W. R. Grace and Beatrice to send a message echoing in every corporate boardroom across America, it is also to win fame and fortune for the lawyers. Since the profligate spending on appearances—hand-tailored "lucky" suits; fresh-cut flowers twice a week; sumptuous food that no one even eats—is matched by an equally lavish expenditure on medical studies, geological research, and a host of experts, money itself possesses a mixed character. Imbued with righteous indignation, and with greed, the money flows into "the black hole" of the Woburn case. As Harr chronicles the money spent on the lawsuit, we can almost see the water-table dropping.

Of course, those who possess the deepest reservoir of money work for the corporations, and Harr's book probes the relationship between corporate money and the judicial system. In a world governed by status, reputation, and old school ties, he suggests, victims represented by personal injury lawyers suffer the consequences of class prejudice. In the end, we have to wonder if the impatient judge who presided over the case is merely obtuse, or blinded by deference. And, after all the money has been spent, the victims compensated, the debts contracted, and the bankruptcies declared, the EPA estimates that the reclamation of the contaminated aquifer will cost $69.4 million, and will take fifty years.

Despite its harrowing conclusion, *A Civil Action* is not an entirely depressing book to read, for Harr's study of morality and motives goes beyond indicting the corporations responsible for poisoning the water and exposing the individuals who covered up the dumping of toxic solvents and industrial wastes onto the vulnerable earth. In the best tradition of the novel of education, *A Civil Action* also celebrates the growth into self-knowledge of its reckless, ambitious, passionate, and compassionate hero. □

Suzanne Keen *teaches English at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.*

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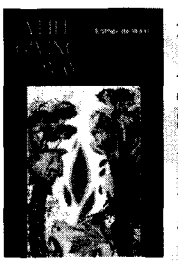

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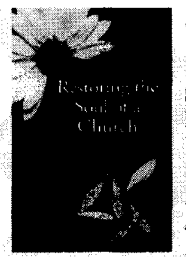

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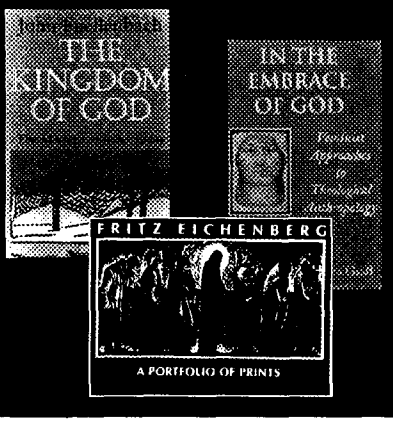

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AN UNHAPPY TRAVELER

The Sign of the Cross
Travels through Catholic Europe
Colm Tóibín
Pantheon, $24, 296 pp.

Edward T. Wheeler

The Sign of the Cross is part story of a pilgrimage, part travel book which offers to take us in the company of its author on "Travels through Catholic Europe." We go with Colm Tóibín, the forty-year-old Irish novelist, critic, and journalist, to many places: to Lourdes to bathe in the waters, to Seville to see the Palm Sunday procession, to Vilnius to try to understand the Lithuanian church, and, with dangers of war as backdrop, to Medjugorje in Croatia to a shrine of the Virgin. With the author we interview believers, converts, professors of literature, visionaries, and politicians; and with Tóibín, we "cheat" in various ways on peregrination to Saint Jacques at Compostela. There are some remarkable moments: his characterization of the pope's effect upon the crowds at the monastery of the Black Madonna (Jasna Gora); the careful exegesis of his response to the Bach *Saint John Passion* sung in a Regensberg chapel; an interview with an Austrian theologian. And there is a topicality to it all, especially the travels through the former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.

However, in a book about so many different places the recourses the writer adopts run the risk of becoming formulaic—a contact in a foreign place, an interview, rambling about the city, going to a service during Holy Week, exploring the connections between Catholicism and politics, and alternating between lapses into mysteries of the soul and lapses back into lapsed Catholicism. Tóibín also does a great deal of unhappy late-night drinking in bars. In fact, he seems to be very unhappy with much of what he does. There is a Hemingway-like toughness to the narration and much reporting of dialogue without comment. And with that (*pace* Hemingway), a sort of gracelessness under pressure of grace which is the worrying tone of the book.

If a Catholic who has lapsed from his faith sets out on a pilgrimage to look at "Catholic Europe," what, we may ask, is he likely to find? Not the Heavenly Jerusalem in any of its manifestations. It's fair to hazard that he will discover estrangement from the faithful. We can infer that the motive which drives the pilgrim has got something to do with strong childhood experiences in the church, so we can also guess that the traveler will find his past self in memory, also estranged. And the third likelihood is that he will find others like him, strangers in lands of the spirit which they once called home. He will also find himself back where he started; very much an inhabitant of the inns and taverns of this world.

Another question comes to mind: why would we want to follow him? *The Sign of the Cross* is not a conversion story, nor is it a wrestling with theological issues. Colm Tóibín can claim attention as an observer of character and place. His audience appears to be those who lived deeply Catholic childhoods which were crossed by Vatican II and by coming of age. Adulthood for them meant growing out of faith. Tóibín is offering them witness: he wants to record histories, personal and national, of distinctly Catholic communities like that of his own Enniscorthy in Ireland. In doing so he is finding himself, through similarity and through difference. The reader might find a similar opportunity for self-discovery, especially those of us who like the author are unhappily lapsed. There is one point where Tóibín seems to center on the purpose of his book: he questions Jim McCormack, a middle-aged Glasgow University student, as to why, astonishingly, there is but one Catholic

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Scottish novelist. In the course of the conversation, the rich details of life in a minority Catholic community emerge. Tóibín remarks: "I don't remember if I said that there were at least two or three novels in what he had told me, and more, perhaps, in what he had left out, and that his country, despite itself, needs Catholic novelists, especially lapsed ones."

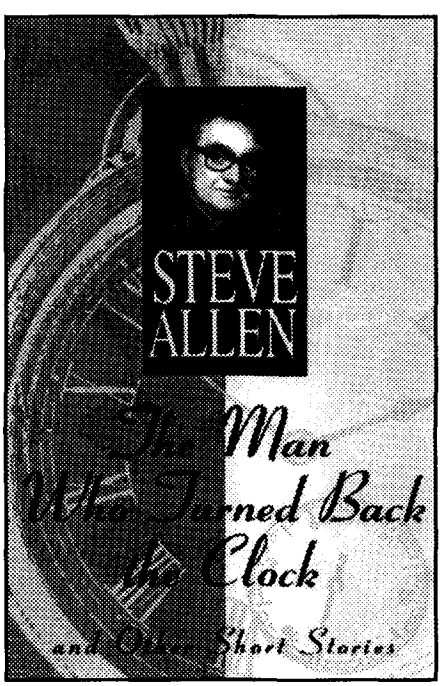
The Sign of the Cross tries in nonfiction form to answer that need, for Scotland and for all the many places Tóibín visits. Experiences defined by Catholicism should be made public. Consider the minute particulars; don't let the details slip; record what is unique and share it as such.

Tóibín's two novels, I must admit, promised a great deal. *The South* and *The Heather Blazing* are powerful tales which work on many levels but are particularly successful in evoking worlds the narrator is too young to know. They are acts of a strong imagination and I recommend them highly. Whatever happened when the reporter replaced the novelist, I am

not sure, but some of *The Sign of the Cross* suffers from spareness that borders on weariness. The book is not slackly written; the writer has a job to do and gets it done. He has filled out his form, kept his contract to meet and discuss issues with whomever his contacts in Catholic Europe might be, but as the narrator indicates, often he would very much like to cheat, finish early, and get home.

There is a second book framing the travel book, unsettling as much of the latter is subdued. It marks a pilgrimage into the past to recognize suppressed grief. Sorrow over his father's death lies buried with Tóibín's memories of the funeral rites. The central chapter in which he records this quest gives the collection its name; it is anticipated in the first chapter and in a sense is bidden farewell in the last. The synecdoche involved is deliberate and shows something of the novelist's craft: the journey within which mimics the journey without, desire for reconciliation with the earthly father recalls the need for unity with the heavenly father. In the moment of crisis presided over by a priestly psychiatrist, Tóibín finds a sort of healing in dredging up a sign, the sign of the cross. Ambiguously but not transcendentally, the cross that is the mark of his religion marks also his family heritage and identity. The last chapter, "The End of Time," tells us that the profound passions and allegiances which made him what he is exist no more; what was is the stuff of novels. The Great Book of Life is literature. And his unhappy message is that indeed. □

Edward T. Wheeler *is dean of the faculty at the Williams School in New London, Connecticut.*



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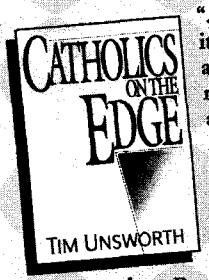

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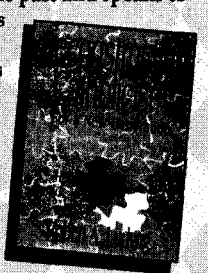

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THEOLOGY: FROM DICE TO LICE

A Big-Enough God
A Feminist's Search for a Joyful Theology
Sara Maitland
Henry Holt and Company, $22.50, 191 pp.

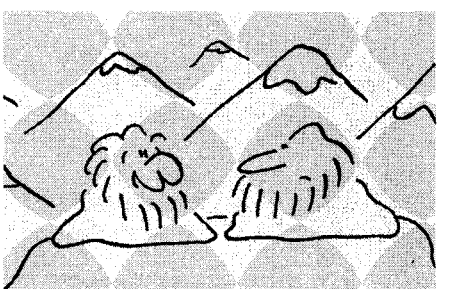
Luke Timothy Johnson

The four chapters that make up the bulk of this nonbulky and attractive book were first worked out in a series of four lectures to the Anglican clergy of inner East London during Lent 1992. Now they appear as classic essays, investigations of a single topic from several angles, written with equal parts deftness and purpose. Appropriate to the highly personal style of lecture and essay, Maitland's introduction is basically autobiographical. Telling the reader how she came to the search for a "big-enough God," she also shows something of what that quest means. This is the part of the book where the subtitle, "A *Feminist's* Search for a Joyful Theology" is most pertinent, both because she spends some time in the introduction addressing the question of female language about God, and because the explicit identification and acknowledgment of one's own social location and "voice" is distinctively feminist in its approach.

A novelist and nonfiction writer of considerable reputation, Maitland acknowledges, "I am not a theologian. I am Christian, a feminist, and a writer: a fictionalizer, a liar in Plato's definition." She asks the reader, therefore, to see her project not as scientific but as a "meditation, a contemplation of God in this particular aspect of revelation." In addition to telling us that she was born Presbyterian, became Anglican, and then joined the Roman Catholic church in 1993—with all that such a progression by an avowed feminist might suggest about independence of mind or comfort with paradox—she describes some of the characteristics of the theology for which she searches.

On the one hand, she seeks a theology that celebrates *difference* as something desirable, and one that has transformative potential, effective toward political and social change. These characteristics are themselves fundamentally catholic in character, striking the traditional ecclesial notes of universality (difference) and holiness (transformation). On the other hand, she seeks this theology within the framework of revelation. For worried readers, it should be said at once that Maitland could not be more explicit in her affirmation of the teachings of Scripture and tradition. Where she seeks a more expansive sense of theology and a "large-enough God" is from a source of revelation she considers underappreciated, namely, creation: "I want to bring to the study of some of the discoveries of the mathematicians and physicists the same approach as many Christian spiritual and mystical writers...suggest we bring to the Scriptures."

The four essays, then, deal in different ways with creation as the revelation of God; each of them also celebrates the human capacity to discover God through creation. The first, "Dice Throwing Made Easy," begins with Stephen Hawking and ends with Niels Bohr. Maitland contrasts the timid, fearful functionalism built into such apologetic systems



"Wow!—I didn't think the significance of the universe would be that significant."

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as "creationism," with the wild celebration of God's activity that becomes possible once one embraces the theories of contemporary physics about the age, size, and awesome *freedom* that characterizes this universe which appears not so much as "having been created" but "in the process of creation," and therefore as a system fundamentally open to God: "God has built risk in, and created things thus, so that, not merely at the moral and individual level but at the cosmic level, the creation can participate in its own creativity."

This first essay is filled with excellent things. Not least is her observation that "Bohr's theory of complementarity shows us not that something can be two things at once but that two incompatible discourses can be needed to describe something." A corollary of this is that the choice of discourse (for example, the discourse of faith used to describe reality as "gift from God") is not only a real choice, but also one filled with inevitable risk, for the same reality can be described quite differently within another mode of discourse.

The second essay, "What Am I," illustrates this point by turning to the description of the human person within the discourse of faith and the discourse of the social sciences. This chapter also has its pleasures and penetrating insights. But I found Maitland's enthusiasm for the contributions made by contemporary thought to our understanding of the human person not nearly so infectious as in the case of mathematics and physics. She provides sharp sketches of Darwinism, Marxism, and Freudianism, making the case that these ideologies cannot be ignored, and insisting that the losses represented by embracing their contributions are more than offset by a gain in a sense of incarnation, solidarity, love, and responsibility, not to mention a restored sense of the resurrection of the body. This position, however, depends on a highly selective reading of these ideologies as well as the evidence presented by the daily news concerning the population shaped for several generations by them. Her presentation in this essay also has a certain abstraction and academic apprehension that was strikingly absent from the introduction and first essay. I find it hard to agree that we have lost "nothing worth mourning in embracing this century's intellectual explorations into the nature of self, of personhood."

The third essay, "Artful Theology," starts with the corollary of an open-ended creation, namely that "to be a person is to be a creator," but rather than pursue the implications of, for example, human artisanship, she argues that "a vibrant and serious attention to the creative arts, and a profound respect for their makers, is a hallmark of a healthy church." Once more, the essay is not without its virtues, as in its assertion that the telling of stories about the divine is a vital part of the theological enterprise. Much attention is given, however, to assertions concerning the church's philistinism (with which no one would argue), and—far more dubious—to the argument that priests resist poets because they fear the poets' power.

The fourth essay, "Angelic Woodlice

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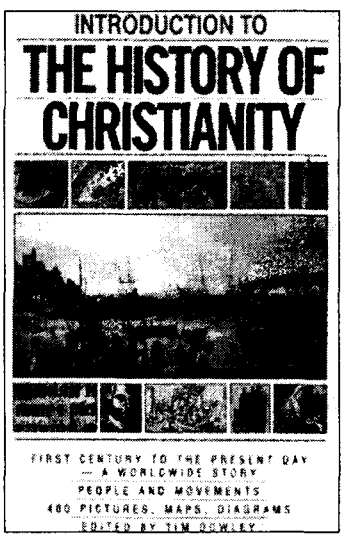

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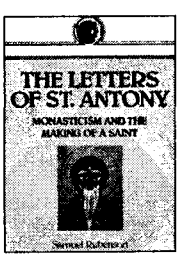

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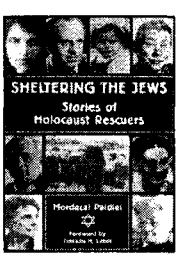

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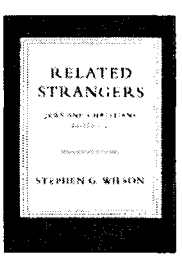

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and Other Delights," tries to make the case that the proper response to the revelation of God in creation is joy: "Quite simply, joy is a virtue and we must practice it, show it forth 'not only on our lips but in our lives,'" and concludes homiletically with "notes on the practice of joy." As with so much in this book, it is a distinctive and refreshing approach to the pious life. But as in the previous two chapters, I found myself putting as many "no's" in the margin of my review copy as I did "yes's," as I found the consistency and cogency of her assertions weakening rather than strengthening.

Not everything in this book works equally well. Taken as a whole, however, and in the spirit with which it is presented, it is well worth reading for its invitation to a fearless and joyful embrace of the world as God's gift and of human existence as the joyful celebration of that gift. □

Luke Timothy Johnson *is professor of New Testament at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University.*

AFTER THEY'VE SEEN PAREE

In Good Hands
The Keeping of a Family Farm
Charles Fish
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, $21, 229 pp.

Wilson Carey McWilliams

Not so long ago, even those Americans who hadn't been raised on farms were apt to be the children of erstwhile farmers and peasants, or to live in towns that moved to the rhythms of rural life. Agriculture had a central place in national imagery; Uncle Sam was only Old MacDonald in his Sunday best. All of that is now pretty much a thing of the past, and Charles Fish deserves thanks for reminding us of the quality of that increasingly distant way of life.

Telling a story of a farm near Rutland, Vermont, still in the family after more than a century-and-a-half, Fish draws on essays by his great-great grandfather, the farm's founder, his grandmother's reminiscences, and his own diary, written as a seven-year-old in 1944. His prose is stately, satin and madeira, and a little sad, as any memoir is bound to be. And he has a grand heroine in his grandmother, a Vermonter and hence a little flinty, not inclined to let feelings threaten her self-government, but no stranger to laughter either. In Fish's warm remembrance, she is serene in her belief in human equality, confident that what matters in moral life—especially in the nurturing of children—is universal and unchanging, a kinswoman to the old lady in Robert Frost's "The Black Cottage," who "had some art of hearing and yet not hearing the latter wisdom of the world."

Yet while Fish admires the quiet decencies of rural life, he doesn't prettify. He is reserved about sex and procreation, but he lets his readers see the farm not only as a place of germinating and growing, but of slaughter and death, with rats under the barn floor, waiting for blood and offal. The art of farming, Fish indicates, assumes that each thing has a right time and way to die, and recognizing that life requires the taking of life, farming requires a hallowing by purpose.

A farm is a human construction, its boundaries defined by law. But the working premise of the farm, Fish observes, is that nature—including human nature—requires cultivation to tease out its excellences. Implicitly, the farm subordinates convention to nature, the part to the whole.

Farm life was emphatically local, of course: begun a few days after D-day, Fish's diary makes no mention of the war, although it does record his rising from private to sergeant in one childhood game, and he remembers learning to hate Nazis through the movies. The farming community believed that the best government is immediate and personal, tailored to human dimensions. The public stage of such small places had speaking parts for almost everyone, teaching the foundations of citizenship as readily as farming, at its best, taught work for a common end. By contrast, as Fish notes, even public places in contemporary life are likely to be shaped and governed by private purposes. Our lives are increasingly postpolitical, pointing back to the self; the farm's parochialities were linked to larger dramas.

Still, although Fish writes with "reserve and circumspection"—the way his grandmother talked, I imagine—he doesn't hide the wolf in the farm's Arcadia. Agrarian America believed in an unchanging moral order, but also in progress and transformation. The contradiction made for uneasiness and denial: Fish reports that the family or-

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dinarily addressed changes in the conditions of life only in allusions or by silence. Subtly, however, the farm's scales were weighted in the direction of modernity. Fish's great-great grandfather wrote that God "created all things for man" and gave him dominion over them; the Bible gives human beings only the limited authority of stewards. Part of a liberal republic, Fish's farm was founded on terms which assume the propriety of human mastery and the pursuit of gain. The family often spoke of the farm as a patrimony, a home place to be passed intact to subsequent generations, but they also saw it as capital, assets held for exchange: as Fish tells us, the possibility of a "higher return" has always been the farm's nemesis.

And as much as Fish admires the virtue of farming, it is not a life he has chosen for himself. Even as a child, Fish was an "irregular," a sometime visitor, and reflection took him beyond the farm's horizons. The farm is a place to come back to, a reminder of first things, a mark by which to measure times and people. Yet by stirring his speculation about the way things come to be and pass away, the farm led Fish to reflect on the transience and value of all human orders, political societies as well as farms. Fish has reason to cherish the farm's "remarkable achievement" as the nurturing Ithaca of his personal odyssey, just as we have a need for its enduring curriculum. □

Wilson Carey McWilliams *is professor of political science at Rutgers University.*

DOVE HUNTING

Intimate Enemies
Jews and Arabs in a Shared Land
Meron Benvenisti
University of California Press, $24.95, 260 pp.

Jo-Ann Mort

Meron Benvenisti, former deputy mayor of Jerusalem under Teddy Kollek, is best known for a formula he devised concerning Israel's entanglement with the occupied territories. Benvenisti's thesis was dubbed "five minutes to midnight" when he put it forward in the 1980s. He theorized that within moments the clock would tick and the witching hour of midnight would strike, making territorial compromise and a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians impossible. Luckily for all concerned, his thesis has been proven wrong.

Benvenisti, who once ran the valuable West Bank DataBase Project, is now a professor and a columnist for Israel's leading newspaper, *Ha'aretz*. Yet, the years in which Benvenisti was a mainstay on the Israeli left and a respected expert on Israeli-Arab affairs appear to have left him with a grudge against forces in the peace camp that taints his writing. Too often, his persona in this book comes across as if he were a party of one, exploiting the luxury of the intellectual to rise above politics to critique the peace process and the Israeli peace movement. This tone is an unfortunate flaw in a valuable book.

Benvenisti argues that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is an intertribal conflict between Jews and Palestinian Arabs, not a geopolitical battle, as it has been seen by most commentators. He faults the Peace Now movement, the major extraparliamentary peace force in Israel, for posing the issue as one of getting rid of West Bank territories that are not part of Israel. Rather, he urges all involved to acknowledge the intricate interlocking of the Jews and Palestinians throughout the entire region of Israel and the occupied territories.

For Benvenisti, because of the intercommunal nature of the fight between

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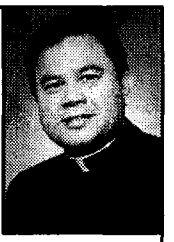

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Jews and Palestinians, the problems now on the negotiating table will not lead to a resolution, no matter how many documents are signed. This communal battle is beyond borders. He cites recent clashes and terrorist incidents like the 1990 riot on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and the murders by an Arab laborer of Jews in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Baka—the Upper West Side of Jerusalem, populated by leaders of the Peace Now movement and academics—to prove his thesis. Conflict, according to Benvenisti, can't be contained outside of the Green Line comprising the pre-1967 border.

He criticizes those in the peace movement who speak of "disentanglement" with the West Bank Palestinians, using the aforementioned incidents within Israel to prop up his arguments. "The Left fostered a world view that externalized the conflict and focused it on the territories: there, beyond the psychological barrier of the Green Line, the Palestinians fought for their national liberation; there unbearable things happened...." Benvenisti goes on to chronicle the vast injustices done to the Arab population within Israel proper as more evidence of interethnic warfare.

No prominent Israeli dove has stated that the ending of the Israeli occupation will solve all the problems of relations between Jews and Arabs within and without the pre-1967 Israeli borders. That would be sheer nonsense. But there are fundamental differences between an occupied people, as are the West Bank Palestinians, and the Israeli Arabs, who are citizens of a state, albeit second-class citizens.

Benvenisti hammers away at the injustices against Israeli Arabs, which are serious and a challenge to Israel's democracy. Indeed, the *intifada* helped highlight the inequalities because so many Arab citizens within Israel showed sympathy for the West Bank uprising. One of the ironies of the emergence of a Palestinian state is that Israel will be forced to come to terms with those Israeli Arabs who live within the internationally recognized borders of the new state. Indeed, as Israelis' links with the Arab world expand, there will be more of a spotlight placed on Israel's own Arab citizens.

Benvenisti argues for a federated Israel/Palestine state. That may happen, but not in the manner he envisions, which is a veiled binational state. He laces his argument for a federated state with vitriol against those Israeli doves who "wish to detach themselves from an alien civilization and attach themselves to the 'Western World.'" Again, Benvenisti raises himself above the fray, attacking nameless activists and intellectuals. In fact, Israeli doves are among the only people in Israel who are building bridges to Palestinians, both within and without the pre-1967 borders. Think tanks, journals, dialogue groups, and meetings are being born as a direct result of the ongoing peace process.

Benvenisti is quite critical of the incremental peace that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin is implementing, even as he appears baffled by its relative success. While he's critical of Rabin, there's virtually no mention of the strong opposition Rabin faces from ideological, even fanatical, West Bank settlers and their powerful supporters among the Orthodox Jewish community in the United States and Republicans in Congress. Under such circumstances, Rabin's caution is understandable.

Unlike most commentators who saw the 1992 election of Rabin and his center-left coalition as a mandate for peace, Benvenisti says that the election was not about the territories, which had been "stripped of ideology" for most Israelis except for the hard-core minority who live in the West Bank. According to Benvenisti, Israel has, like many other nations, moved into a postideological phase. But if that is true, the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict becomes one of satisfying Israeli Jews that they are more secure without the West Bank territories than with them. Personal security is an issue resolved by politicians and their police forces, not by philosophers, no matter how moral their argument may be. □

Jo-Ann Mort *is on the editorial board of* Dissent *and is a frequent contributor to the* Forward *newspaper. She is also a member of the national board for Americans for Peace Now.*

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

One is reminded of Napoleon's exchange with Cardinal Consalvi during the 1801 Concordat negotiations in Paris. To the French emperor's threat that if he did not get his way he would destroy the church, Consalvi responded laconically that the clergy had been trying to do this for centuries and had not succeeded.

(REV.) JOHN JAY HUGHES
Saint Louis, Mo.

Gaillot as threat

While appreciating Steven Englund's information about Bishop Jacques Gaillot, especially with regard to his mistreatment of his vicar general, I am troubled by Englund's stance, which strikes me as somewhat fuzzy. Even in the section making the case for the ousted bishop, Englund is heavily critical, and his case against Gaillot is hardly one that the *Commonweal* of yore would have espoused.

Englund's central argument is that Gaillot's personal failings and his lack of solidarity with fellow French bishops warrant his removal, when hundreds of quite secure bishops have greater personal failings, including betrayal of one or another of their priests and failure to honor their word. As for solidarity, Cardinals O'Connor, Law, and Krol have been notoriously at odds with the agreed position of the United States Catholic Conference against engaging in single-issue (abortion) politics.

Equally troubling about Englund's article is the long list of Gaillot's dissents from the views of his fellow French hierarchs—on nuclear arms, underpaid Catholic school teachers, immigrant voting rights, haven for Palestinian refugees, disarmament, condoms to control AIDS, the competence of Rome to judge the homosexual condition, nuclear tests, President Aristide, the Treaty of Maastricht, the Gulf War, the Vatican's disrespect for due process, the admission of divorced and remarried persons to the Eucharist, married priests, and, it

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would seem, in his public support for criminals and the poor. Yet, his are invariably positions, as *Commonweal* readers will appreciate, that his fellow bishops should also have espoused, and that many beyond France have supported.

Englund's parading of Gaillot's dissents alongside the argument that he was not in solidarity with his fellow bishops implies that Gaillot was often in left field. (Neither was the heroically outspoken Bishop Willy Romulus in solidarity with his fellow Haitian bishops or the Vatican during the Cedras terror.) Rather, in the church of John Paul II-bishops, it means that he is another of the Vatican II breed who, like Archbishop Hunthausen and Brazilian Bishop Casaldaliga, has to be neutralized lest his repeated cries that the emperor is naked give scandal. Whatever his personal shortcomings, like Hans Küng and Leonardo Boff, Bishop Gaillot represented a threatened breach in the wall of comfortable and eminently safe hierarchical power now under siege in all progressive church quarters—and doomed.

WILLIAM H. SLAVICK
Portland, Maine

Gaillot's vision

I was disappointed in Steven Englund's piece on Jacques Gaillot. Englund doesn't seem to realize that Gaillot's vision is far larger than that of the Roman church in France.

I am a Quaker. Many of my friends in the religious community see Gaillot as a searchlight focusing our attention on issues that touch the conscience of a greater community.

Where is the religious focus on the French nuclear tests if it was not brought to us by Gaillot's presence? It seems to many of us that Gaillot acts as Jesus would if he were with us. The real question is where others in the church are when Gaillot is in the prisons, in the homeless community, with homosexuals, or with war resisters.

Find others to write for us on this man of such great Christian vision.

BURRILL HANSON
Milwaukee, Wis.

The author replies:

I hope William Slavick gets more exercise than by jumping to conclusions. "Fuzzy" my analysis may be, but it does not call for Gaillot's "removal." Rather, I claimed that there is enough evidence to constitute probable cause for a formal and public inquiry of Gaillot by ecclesiastical authority. There is no need to reargue the question; readers may review the article to judge whether it supplies sufficient reason to justify my conclusion.

No one appreciates more than I do that the bishop of Evreux's positions are largely ones that *Commonweal* readers would find congenial, but that is not the point at issue. The point is Gaillot's suitability for remaining ordinary of a diocese.

Concerning Burrill Hanson, again, while I appreciate that Gaillot may be

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regarded as a visionary by people within, as without, the Catholic church, the matter at hand concerns less the content of his vision *per se*, than his leadership position in Evreux and, in the light of that, his membership in the French episcopate. Indeed, in Gaillot's new position as bishop without portfolio, freed from administrative and pastoral duties, one might argue that he will be better able to bring attention to various national and international causes. Gaillot is still a priest and a bishop, still receives his salary, has not been silenced. To say this is not to say that the Vatican's course of action in his case was in keeping with contemporary standards of due process. It was not.

STEVEN ENGLUND

The triviality of pop

The issue on Catholicism and popular culture [September 22] was interesting, but I feel that Dennis O'Brien really missed the point. Historically, the church has adapted much of popular culture, including relics, the cult of the saints, and holidays. Current popular culture, however, is ultimately trivial and self-centered with a misplaced sense of the sacred, which certainly is opposed to the essence of Christianity.

On the other hand, popular culture has learned how to use the image effectively, while mainstream Christianity may have lost the ability to use the image as a vehicle for salvation. Contemporary church art is often abstract and beautiful but does not provide the faithful with permanent or lasting images. It was unfortunate that the saccharine Victorian images did so much to form pre-Vatican II piety, but the hymns effectively conveyed images that stayed with people for a long time. The current hymns may have a sound scriptural and theological basis but they focus on ideas and sentiments rather than images. That may be a very serious mistake.

A.W. GODFREY
Stony Brook, N.Y.

Paying for the schools—I

Re: Joseph Claude Harris's "How to Pay for Catholic Schools" [October 6]: In some dioceses, particularly in their inner-city parishes, the number of non-Catholic families using parochial schools can be significant. These schools are a worthy, even noble, expression of the Catholic community's concern for the poor and, often, a dignified form of evangelization. But there are financial consequences which have not always been thought out. For example, the Catholic families using the school provide it with two forms of income: their tuition and some percentage of their income contributed to the parish. From the non-Catholic family there is only the tuition payment (albeit sometimes set at a higher rate than that charged the Catholic family). In most cases neither the regular nor the higher tuition covers the cost of educating a pupil.

Mr. Harris rightly notes that the cohort of religious women teachers has by now been almost completely replaced by lay teachers who are more numerous and more expensive. Be it noted that, often, they are also unionized. And the unions have a real agenda: They want to move toward parity of salary and teaching conditions with teachers in the public schools. These demands and their implementation can have repercussions within parishes. Seeking to increase contributions, even for so good a cause as paying the teachers of the parish's children, is perforce to affect the content and style of what is said from the pulpit. This in turn changes the Sunday celebration of the parish community into an occasion for seeking support of all for some in the parish. Impatience is not unknown!

That said, I am, paradoxically, deeply convinced that the parish school and its funding must be connected with the prayer life of the parish. Better to use the money collected at worship than to rely on money brought in by fundraising. If these schools are to remain Catholic, they must retain a serious and regular connection with that event which makes us a Catholic community, an event that provides a foundation and example for our generosity.

But all of this—to go back to union negotiations—means that these negotiations will be conducted in a context which recognizes that the success of the schools' economic arrangements depends upon what parish families voluntarily put into their envelopes each week. A public school faces a tax vote at most once a year; a Catholic school faces a funding vote each week!

That vote will steadily force the Catholic community to ask itself hard questions: Is parity for its teachers realistic? Is it possible? Is the Catholic community willing to continue, and can it afford, to use its schools for a school-based form of evangelization? Does the Catholic community wish to focus its parish resources so strongly on its parish school? Finally, perhaps especially difficult, is a teachers' union the best vehicle for raising within the parish religious, academic, professional, and economic questions concerning the schools?

To this point many of these questions are answered in the schools' favor, but the schools are no healthier. A community sense of ownership of the good the parochial schools accomplish will encourage their future. We can be grateful for Mr. Harris's article. It helps us along.

(MSGR.) TIMOTHY S. COLLINS
New York, N.Y.

Paying for the schools—II

I thoroughly enjoyed "How to Pay for Catholic Schools," by Joseph Claude Harris [October 6], but want to add some other approaches to those he listed.

1. Create trust funds so ordered that only the income from the trusts can be spent to meet the needs of specific schools. Some schools in Madison, Wisconsin, have established such funds, each with assets of more than $500,000. As an ideal, it has been proposed that a third of the cost of a school's operation should come from

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such income, another third from the parish, the remainder from the students' parents. It works.

2. All Catholic schools should be made into district schools supported by all the parishes within a given public school district. Practically all rural parochial schools are located in a central community, are used by all the rural parishes to some extent, but are not generally supported by these satellite parishes in any way. Yet, public school busing is available to all these rural parishes to get their students to the public schools of the central community. An approximately 100-square-mile area just east of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, has no public schools, only district Catholic schools, which are serviced by public school busing.

Until we can get our bishops really interested in innovative thinking about financing and operating our schools, we might as well just give up on the schools, because no satellite parish will simply volunteer to support a school over which it has no control and that is out of sight in another community.

TERRENCE J. KURTZWEIL
La Valle, Wis.

Which Catholic schools?

As a Catholic parent of four and as an active parishioner, I read Joseph Harris's article with great interest. My wife and I contribute annually to our parish (which doesn't have a school) and annually to the diocese. When many or most of the Catholic schools were in the inner city, I didn't complain. What I see now, though, is a Catholic school system that almost exclusively serves an affluent suburban population that has chosen to escape the poverty and the ethnic mix most of us confront. These schools are really private schools with a religion class once a day. Meantime, here and elsewhere, inner-city schools are being closed. If I see the Catholic schools recommitting themselves to serving those most in need, I will feel better about increasing my support.

ROBERT (KIP) HARGRAVE
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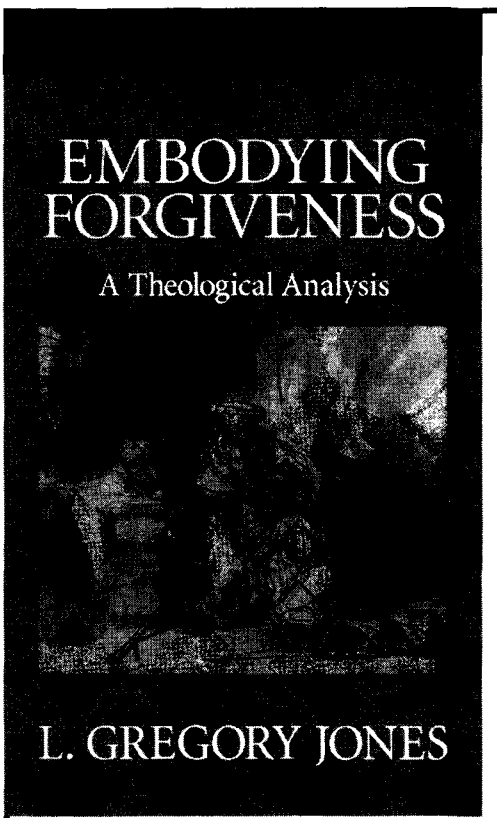

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ELEGY FOR THE EVENING NEWS

Eugene J. McCarthy

When the news of the removal of Connie Chung from the "CBS Evening News" broke, I was not particularly moved to concern. If anything, I was sympathetic to Connie, whom I have observed from the time when she worked for a Washington, D.C., TV station. I had some reservations about Dan Rather, not for any observed professional behavior, but because my dog (now dead) used to go to the apartment door to be taken out for her evening walk just as Dan came on to do the evening news.

Connie has charged gender discrimination. Rather denies any. There are, I believe, more significant issues involved. The whole concept of "evening news" is in play. Ed Murrow was the original TV news star. He was not an anchorman, he was *the* man. He had sponsors, but his program was not interrupted by advertisements. The only interruptions were the silences, while Ed drew on his cigarette, small puffs for minor news, deep, prolonged inhalations for more serious matters.

With the coming of Walter Cronkite, the anchorman was identified, and news became commercial, allowing the intervention of advertising after each or several news stories. Actually the nature of the ads was adjusted to the image of the anchor person. With Walter, the advertising reflected the concerns and needs of his audience, one beginning to experience the coming of disabilities associated with age. Years ago I made a study of Walter's program on two successive nights when Walter was reporting on six ongoing crises. One was Three Mile Island, with Diane Sawyer staked out in the rising mists of the Susquehanna River, she seemingly threatening to mutate. The news report was followed by an advertisement for Tums, as relief for heartburn and acid indigestion. The second crisis reported by Walter (it may have been further down the list) was Mt. Saint Helen's, followed by an advertisement for Polygrip (mint-flavored). Three other crises followed, with intervention by Martha Ray, plugging a product which would make false teeth five times whiter, an ad for Procelana, designed to remove brown spots from aging hands, and a compelling ad showing a man of about forty-five years chasing a woman of about twenty on a sandy beach and catching her, because, the ad said, he was taking iron tablets. The program ended with an advertisement for Ex-Lax, after which Walter said, "That's the way it is."

With the coming of Rather there was a slight change in the tenor, substance, and emphasis of the ads. A laxative said to be milder than Ex-Lax and more suitable for women was introduced, and frequent advertisements for hemorrhoid relief, especially through the use of Preparation H, after which Dan would conclude the news with, "That's it from CBS" or "That's part of our world today." For several weeks, in the time before Connie was brought in, Dan tried standing up as he delivered the news, to be more forceful, the network said, although there was a suspicion that Preparation H was not working.

Tricks, props, new personnel, racial and gender balance cannot save the evening news for it is basically in conflict with nature. Primitive societies look on twilight and sunset as magical times. The Muslims observe the coming of dark with special prayers. Christians mark it with vespers. The poet Longfellow reserved it as "The Children's Hour" for "Alice, laughing Allegro, and Edith of the golden hair." Now it is reserved for Rather, Jennings, and Brokaw.

The natural time force is evident in the ratings of the anchor persons. Huntley-Brinkley led the charts for years. They were laid back, the shows ending on a slow, low note, like a clock needing winding. Neither Huntley nor Brinkley seemed to want to do the closing story, but just let things stop.

Walter, too, was reassuring in a way. Although he stressed crises, there was a kind of sameness about them. Three Mile Island and a decline of four or five points in the New York Stock Exchange averages elicited equal concern. Barbara Walters, in the group that supported Connie after she had been taken off the evening news, seemed to suggest that she herself had been removed from a joint venture with Harry Reasoner, on ABC, for gender reasons. She had been a great success on "Good Morning America." But morning voices, she should have recognized, are not good twilight voices. Her voice has good morning qualities. It was, and is, raucous. "Get out of bed." "You'll miss the commuter train," etc. Crows cry havoc in all seasons and at all times of day, except evening.

If one applies the voice and manner test to today's three leading anchormen, the vespers factor prevails. Rather rates last. He is too harsh, too demanding, for twilight. Both God and man are fairly passive at vespers. Brokaw has a relatively neutral voice and approach, better for noon-day, pre-*siesta* news. He holds second place in the ratings. Jennings is in first, principally, I think, because as his broadcast proceeds he seems to become increasingly tired, or bored, and about to go to sleep.

Meanwhile, the curfew tolls the knell of parting day. The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea. And leaves the world to darkness and TV. □

Eugene J. McCarthy *lives in Woodville, Virginia.*

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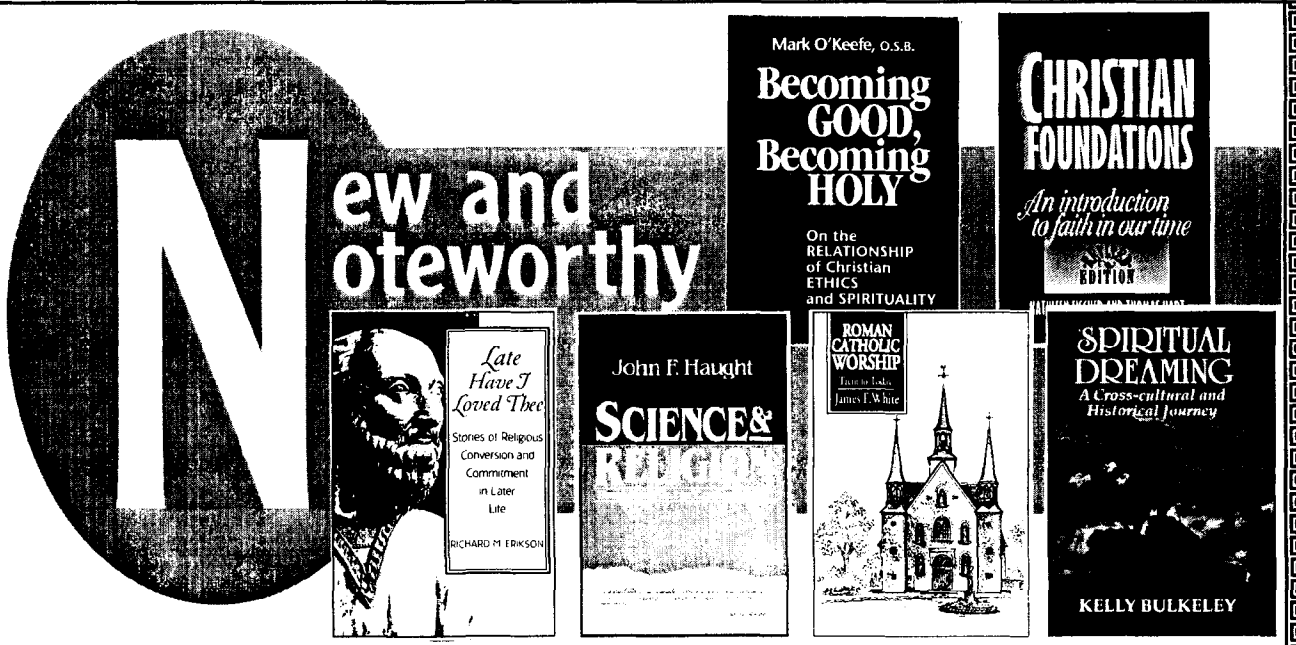
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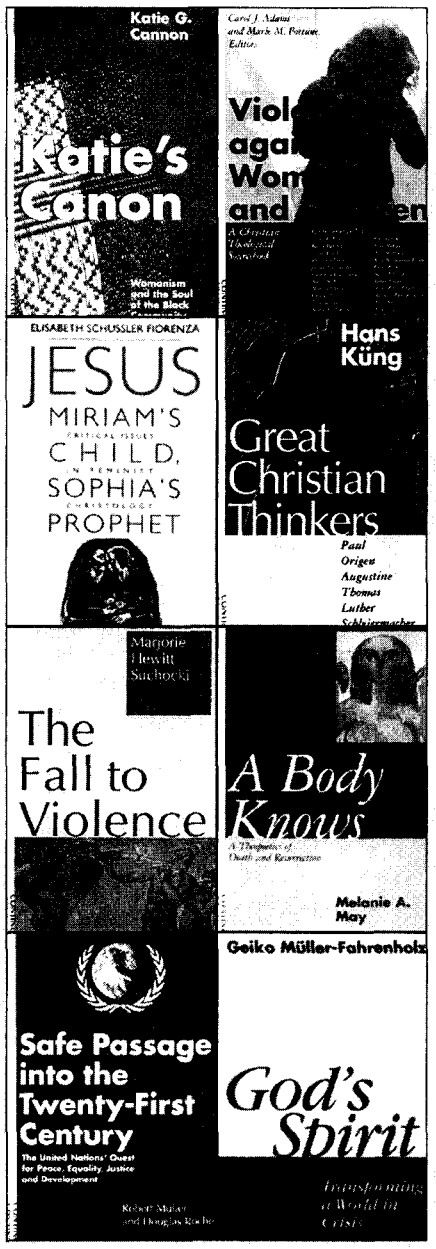

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